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A Spy For a Spy

STRANGERS ON A BRIDGE: The
Case of Colonel Abel. By James B.
Donovan. 432 pp. New York:
Atheneum. \$6.95.

By ALLEN DULLES

THE events of Saturday, Feb. 10, 1962, were unique in the strange history of the Iron Curtain. On that date, between East and West, two men passed in opposite directions, each a representative of the craft of intelligence. One was Col. Rudolph Abel, an illegal Soviet resident agent in the United States. The other was Francis Gary Powers, the U-2 pilot. Neither had ever seen the other before that cold gray morning on the Glienicke Bridge separating East and West Berlin. Their fates had been bound together through the work of James B. Donovan.

In "Strangers on a Bridge," Donovan has presented, enthrallingly, the stories of these two men. When I was first asked to review the book, I hesitated. In an official capacity I had been involved in both incidents. While I was its director, the Central Intelligence Agency had been responsible for turning up the first clues leading to the apprehension of Colonel Abel in 1957. Needless to say, I was no stranger to the Powers case. Also I was an old friend of Donovan's from the days of the Office of Strategic Services, when we both were working for his distinguished namesake, Wild Bill Donovan. For Jim Donovan is a professional, not only in the law, but also in intelligence. My scruples disappeared, however, when I read the book. It is a truly remarkable and balanced account of how its author fulfilled his stewardship as a lawyer and proved his worth as a negotiator.

HERE, once again, in the first story (the account of Abel's trial) is American justice at its finest. The Soviet Government had repudiated the man called Abel—whose true name and identity is not known—but our judicial system assured him a fair trial, and the Brooklyn Bar Association secured, in Donovan, an eminent advocate to defend him. One can only wonder what Moscow thought about it all. Certainly they must have been amazed at our legal procedures. They probably thought us crazy to quibble among ourselves about the way we obtained evidence of a spy's guilt.

Each of the two stories Donovan tells, the trial and the exchange, has a fairy-tale type of ending with virtue triumphing. In the first story, he emerges as a hero, although he presents his role modestly and objectively, in a trial which most of his friends told him might end his legal career.

And he so emerges because he fought hard to see that every legal defense was presented. On the whole, it was fortunate for Donovan that he had an honorable, though hairline, defeat. If the result had been that a Soviet spy was to go unpunished because of an alleged technical error in obtaining the evidence, the popular feeling of frustration might have turned against Donovan.

There were points of real tension between the lawyer and his client, the highly intelligent and crafty Colonel Abel. Obviously each had a kind of respect for the other. Donovan recounts how on Nov. 15, 1957, just after the strain of argument prior to the passing of the sentence—Abel received 30 years imprisonment—he visited Abel in his cell. As Donovan writes, "Abel seemed to have no care in the world." This dramatic scene follows:

"That wasn't bad," he said finally. "What you said up there was quite well done. But you are correct in your law points and I have only one question. When your appeal succeeds and the indictment is dismissed, what happens to me then?"

"My shirt was damp and heavy against my sides with perspiration. I was emotionally drained, and now he had the gall to tell me, 'Not bad.' This cool professional's self-control was too much for me just then.

"Rudolf," I said, looking him directly in the face, 'if all my work is successful, I may have to shoot you myself. Don't forget, I still am a commander in Naval Intelligence.'

"He puffed once, exhaled and then said quietly, 'You know, I think you would.'

"The tension was broken. He offered me one of his cigarettes and then we got down to business . . ."—the business of deciding upon the appeal.

THE second story follows hard on to the final disposition of the Abel case by a 5-4 decision of the Supreme Court of the United States on March 28, 1960. Donovan's plea to the New York Court on Abel's sentencing strongly recommended that the death sentence, a possible punishment, not be imposed. With rare foresight, he argued that the time might come when an American would be caught in Russia and an exchange might be in the best interests of the United States.

The force of Donovan's prophecy was shown later when Francis Gary Powers and his U-2 plane came down with a thud in May, 1960, deep in Soviet territory. After more than a hundred days of solitary confinement and a certain amount of "conditioning" for trial, Powers was given a show trial and a Soviet stooge to defend him. The whole proceeding contrasted vividly with the American trial, though Powers's sentence of 10 years of imprisonment and confinement was more moderate than the 30 years given to Abel.

Donovan was quick to see the possibilities in this new situation and he presented to our Government strong arguments for an exchange. I am myself skeptical about spy swapping with the Soviets. They are likely to leave more exchange material in our hands than we in theirs. Hence they may do as they have in the past: arrest innocent victims to have a ready "stable" of exchanges.

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